AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A ~~computerized~~ method, ~~for determining a community rating for a particular user of a plurality of users within an electronic community~~ comprising:

    ~~maintaining a~~ associating one or more characteristic ~~value for~~ values with each user of [[the]] a plurality of users, [[each]] the one or more characteristic [[value]] values representing [[a]] an individual rating ~~for a given~~ associated with each user; and

    ~~maintaining a set of relationships between the plurality of users; and~~

    deriving [[a]] one or more community ~~rating~~ ratings ~~for the~~ uniquely corresponding to a particular user by ~~performing a function on~~ utilizing the one or more characteristic values ~~of the users of~~ associated with each user of the plurality of users related to the particular user and the one or more characteristic values associated with the particular user.

2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, ~~wherein the~~ further comprises an electronic community ~~is a community for the buying and selling of~~ to trade merchandise over a network, wherein the trading of the merchandise comprises buying or selling of goods or services.

3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 2, wherein the network comprises the ~~internet.~~ Internet.

4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the <u>one or more</u> characteristic ~~value is~~ <u>value comprise a feedback value</u> based on feedback <u>concerning the particular user</u> received from other users of the plurality of users in the electronic community.

5. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 4, wherein the ~~feedback is received from~~ other users <u>of the plurality of users comprise</u> [[who]] <u>users that</u> have ~~bought or sold goods or services~~ <u>previously traded the merchandise</u> with the particular user.

6. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, ~~wherein the set of relationships~~ <u>further comprises maintaining a relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users, the relationship tree</u> includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user and any users of the plurality of users that were sponsored by the particular user.

7. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 6, wherein the <u>sponsorship</u> relationships of the plurality of users are represented as <u>the relationship tree including</u> one or more n-ary trees.

8. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 6, wherein information concerning the <u>sponsorship</u> relationships between the plurality of users is stored in <u>a</u> data ~~structures~~ <u>structure</u> for each user of the plurality of users.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8, wherein the data structure for the particular user contains a pointer to at least one user of the plurality of users that was sponsored by the particular user.

10. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein ~~a recursive routine is used in determining a~~ the deriving of the one or more community ~~rating~~ ratings for the particular user is performed utilizing a recursive routine.

11. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [[10,]] 1, wherein the one or more community ~~rating~~ ratings and the one or more characteristic values ~~are~~ comprise numerical values.

12. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 11, wherein the one or more community ~~rating is~~ ratings comprise an aggregate of the one or more characteristic ~~value for~~ values associated with each user of the plurality of users that is a lineal descendant of the particular user and the one or more characteristic ~~value of~~ values associated with the particular user.

13. (Cancelled)

14. (Currently Amended) A ~~computer-readable~~ machine-readable medium having ~~computer-executable~~ stored thereon data representing sets of instructions ~~for performing a method in a computer system for determining a community rating for a particular user of a plurality of users within an electronic community comprising:~~ which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:

~~maintaining a~~ associate one or more characteristic ~~value for~~ values with each user of [[the]] a plurality of users, [[each]] the one or more characteristic [[value]] values representing [[a]] an individual rating ~~for a given~~ associated with each user;

~~maintaining a set of relationships between the plurality of users;~~ and

~~deriving~~ derive [[a]] one or more community ~~rating~~ ratings for [[the]] a particular

user by ~~performing a function on~~ <u>utilizing</u> the <u>one or more</u> characteristic

values ~~of the users of the plurality of users related to~~ <u>associated with</u> the

particular user.

15. (Currently Amended) The ~~computer-readable~~ <u>machine-readable</u> medium of claim

14, ~~wherein the~~ <u>further comprises an</u> electronic community ~~is a community~~ for ~~the~~

buying and selling of merchandise ~~using an electronic forum~~ <u>over a network, the</u>

<u>merchandise having at least one of goods and services</u>.

16. (Currently Amended) The ~~computer-readable~~ <u>machine-readable</u> medium of claim

15, wherein the <u>one or more</u> characteristic ~~value is~~ <u>values comprise a feedback</u>

<u>value</u> based on feedback <u>concerning the particular user</u> received from other users

of the plurality of users in the electronic community.

17. (Currently Amended) The ~~computer-readable~~ <u>machine-readable</u> medium of claim

[[16,]] <u>14,</u> wherein the ~~set of relationships maintaining~~ <u>sets of instructions which,</u>

<u>when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to maintain a</u>

<u>relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users, the relationship tree</u>

includes sponsorship relationships <u>between the particular user and any user of the</u>

<u>plurality of users that were sponsored by the particular user</u>.

18. (Currently Amended) The ~~computer-readable~~ <u>machine-readable</u> medium of claim

[[17,]] <u>14,</u> wherein the <u>one or more</u> community ~~rating~~ <u>ratings</u> and the <u>one or more</u>

characteristic values [[are]] <u>comprise</u> numerical <u>values</u>, and the <u>one or more</u>

community ~~rating is~~ <u>ratings comprise</u> an aggregate of the <u>one or more</u>

characteristic ~~value for~~ <u>values associated with</u> each user of the plurality of users

that is a lineal descendant of the particular user and the <u>one or more</u> characteristic

~~value of~~ <u>values associated with</u> the particular user derived using a recursive

routine.

[Claims 19–20 (Cancelled)]

21. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the <u>one or more</u> community

~~rating~~ <u>ratings for the particular user</u> ~~comprises~~ <u>represent</u> a reputation value

<u>corresponding to the particular user.</u>

22. (New) A method, comprising:

associating a first characteristic value with a first user of a plurality of users within an

electronic community for trading merchandise, the first characteristic value is

obtained for the first user by utilizing a first feedback value based on feedback

received concerning the first user from other users of the plurality of users;

associating a second characteristic value with a second user of the plurality of users,

wherein the second user is sponsored by the first user and the second

characteristic value is obtained for the second user by utilizing a second

feedback value based on feedback received concerning the second user from

other users of the plurality of users; and

deriving a first community rating for the first user by aggregating the first

characteristic value and the second characteristic value.

23. (New) The method of claim 22, further comprises deriving a second community

rating for the second user by utilizing the second characteristic value.

24. (New) The method of claim 22, further comprises maintaining a relationship tree

between the first user and the second user of the plurality of users.

25. (New) The method of claim 22, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the second user as a lineal descendant of the first user.

26. (New) The method of claim 22, wherein the relationship tree comprises a nexus between the first user, the second user, and other users sponsored by at least one of the first user and the second user.

27. (New) The method of claim 22, wherein the first community rating comprises first reputation value corresponding to the first user, and the second community rating comprises second reputation value corresponding to the second user.

28. (New) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon data representing sets of instructions which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:

associate a first characteristic value with a first user of a plurality of users within an electronic community for trading merchandise, the first characteristic value is obtained for the first user by utilizing a first feedback value based on feedback received concerning the first user from other users of the plurality of users;

associate a second characteristic value with a second user of the plurality of users, wherein the second user is sponsored by the first user and the second characteristic value is obtained for the second user by utilizing a second feedback value based on feedback received concerning the second user from other users of the plurality of users;

deriving a first community rating for the first user by aggregating the first characteristic value and the second characteristic value; and

deriving a second community rating for the second user by utilizing the second characteristic value.

29. (New) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the sets of instructions which, when executed by the machine, further cause the machine to maintain a relationship tree between the first user and the second user of the plurality of users

30. (New) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the relationship tree comprises a sponsorship relationship having the second user as a lineal descendant of the first user.

31. (New) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the relationship tree comprises a nexus between the first user, the second user, and other users sponsored by at least one of the first user and the second user.

32. (New) The machine-readable medium of claim 28, wherein the first community rating comprises first reputation value corresponding to the first user, and the second community rating comprises second reputation value corresponding to the second user.

33. (New) A system, comprising:

a first storage medium; and

a first computer coupled with the first storage medium, the first computer to

associate one or more characteristic values with each user of a plurality of users, the one or more characteristic values representing an individual rating associated with each user, and

derive one or more community ratings for a particular user by utilizing the one or more characteristic values associated with the particular user.

34. (New) The system of claim 33, further comprising:

a second storage medium; and

a second computer coupled with the second storage medium and the first computer

via a network interface, the second computer to

receive feedback concerning the particular user from other users of the

plurality of users,

generate a feedback value corresponding to the particular user based on the

feedback, and

transmit the feedback value to the first computer.

35. (New) The system of claim 34, wherein the first computer comprises a server

computer and the second computer comprises a viewing computer.

36. (New) The system of claim 33, wherein the first computer is further to maintain a

relationship tree between each user of the plurality of users, the relationship tree

includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user and any users of the

plurality of users that were sponsored by the particular user.

37. (New) The system of claim 33, wherein the first computer is further to determine the

one or more characteristic values based on the feedback value corresponding to the

particular user.

38. (New) The system of claim 34, wherein the second computer is accessed by the

plurality of users to trade merchandise, wherein the trading of the merchandise

comprises buying or selling of goods or services.

39. (New) The system of claim 34, wherein the network interface is to couple the first

computer with the second computer over a network having the Internet.